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BERTHA VINING MONTGOMERY AND CONSTANCE NABWIRE

COOKING

THE

WEST AFRICAN

WAY

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Introduction

West African men and women dressed in brightly colored clothing crowd the marketplace in the coastal city of Lagos, Nigeria. They laugh with friends and barter for fresh fruits and vegetables. Here, cooks use whatever foods are in season, adding chile peppers and other spices to give favorite dishes a kick. Fufu, groundnut stew, and jollof rice—foods that are often thought of as typically African—come from West Africa.

The ingredients in spinach stew (recipe on page 57) are easy to find. The dish is also high in nutrition and takes little time to prepare.



The Land and the People

West Africa is a cluster of countries jutting into the South Atlantic Ocean. The region's major nations include Nigeria, Senegal, Ghana, and Côte d'Ivoire. The land is low and flat. Some of it is covered with forests, while other parts are made up of grassy plains called savannas. A region on the coasts is hot, humid, and rainy all year long. The rest of West Africa is also hot throughout the year, with both a wet and a dry season.

People of many different ethnic and religious backgrounds live in West Africa. Although most West Africans are black, they are further divided into hundreds of ethnic groups, each with its own language and traditions. Islam is the dominant religion in the region, but West Africans also practice Christianity. Many West Africans practice traditional religion in addition to either Islam or Christianity.

The lives of West Africans also vary greatly depending on whether they live in the city or the country. Those who live in rural areas have lives that are very much the same as those of their ancestors. They usually live in villages with other people of the same ethnic group. While some villages have houses made of modern materials such as cement and metal, many people still live in houses made of clay or dried mud with roofs of grass or palm leaves.

The people of a West African village depend on each other like members of an extended family. In fact, it is not unusual for everyone in a village to be related in one way or another. Traditionally, the men are responsible for farming the land that surrounds the village. The women help with the farmwork and also cook and take care of the children. Even the children have their role in the life of the village. They learn at an early age to help the adults whenever they can, until they are old enough to take on adult responsibilities.

Many villages don't have modern machines or tools for cooking or farming. Plowing is done with a wooden plow pulled by oxen. Food is prepared with the same kinds of hand tools that have been used in Africa for hundreds of years.

One traditional cooking tool found in nearly every West African home is the mortar and pestle. A pestle is a club-shaped utensil that is used with a mortar, a sturdy bowl, to grind or pound foods. Another essential tool is the sifter, a square or round utensil with a fine wire mesh across the bottom. It is used to remove small particles from larger pieces of food. The most important tool used in traditional African cooking is fire. While stoves are used in the cities, where gas and electricity are available, rural West Africans still cook over a fire, just as their ancestors did.

The Food

Because food is sometimes scarce in certain parts of Africa, West African cooks have learned to work with whatever they have. West African dishes are versatile enough that, if a certain ingredient is not available, it is always possible to substitute another or leave it out.

The main meal, which is usually served in the afternoon or evening, is likely to be made up of a thick stew or soup and a starch. The stew or soup usually contains a variety of vegetables and maybe a little meat, poultry, or fish. The starch can be anything from bread to rice to fufu—a food that tastes kind of like mashed potatoes. In West Africa, the stew and the starch are often combined to make a one-pot meal, such as jollof rice.

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West Africans may eat only two meals per day, but they snack all day long. A snack might be roasted plantains or meat on a stick. In the cities, these and other snack foods are sold on the street.

Because very few people have refrigeration, the cooking of West Africa is based on fresh foods. In the villages, people grow all of their own fruits and vegetables in small gardens. Although the people who live in the cities may have refrigeration and rely somewhat on canned foods, they are still likely to visit the market every day for fresh fruits and vegetables.

West African farmers grow cacao beans, yams, peanuts, corn, plantains, and cassavas. It is hard to believe that the vast majority of these plants were introduced to Africa by the Europeans and Arabs. Among the few plants used for food that are native to West Africa are oil palm, millet, and sorghum.

Along the West African coast, fish are abundant. Chicken and beef are not so plentiful. One reason that soups and stews are such staples in West Africa is that they make a little meat stretch to feed many people. It is not unusual for a meal to contain no meat at all. On the coasts or near large lakes, fish is cheaper than meat, and people often combine meat with fish in the same dish. Chicken is usually saved for guests or special occasions. Meat, poultry, and fish, like fruits and vegetables, are usually served fresh, although they are sometimes preserved by smoking or drying.

To this day, most West African cooks do not use recipes when cooking. In fact, until recently it was considered a disgrace in some areas of West Africa to write down recipes. Instead, they were passed down from generation to generation strictly by memory.

West Africa is thought of as one of the most traditionally African regions on the continent, but European and Indian dishes have crept into the cuisine. Foods from Great Britain and France caught on when the two countries governed the nations of West Africa until the nations gained independence one by one in the mid-1950s and early 1960s. The British, who ruled India for decades, introduced Indian foods to West Africa. Since then, curry has become popular in the region.

The recipes in this book were collected from women in different countries all over West Africa and then adapted to American measuring standards. A few of the recipes have been changed slightly to suit Western tastes. For example, fufu is traditionally made with pounded yams or plantains, and some recipes would contain less meat if prepared in West Africa. Also, many traditional West African foods are spicy hot, often because fiery hot peppers are among the ingredients. The recipes included in this book are spicy, but not as spicy as they would be if prepared in West Africa. But everyone has different tastes. Be aware of this as you are cooking, and adjust the seasonings accordingly. For the most part, however, the recipes are authentic. Once you have had a taste of West African cooking, you might try varying the meats and vegetables, making up your own combinations.

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Holidays and Festivals

West Africa hosts a variety of festivals throughout the year. Traditional foods play an important part in each celebration. In fact, a number of these events are all about food—they may honor a local harvest or celebrate the end of a famine.

West Africans celebrate the harvest of yams more than any other crop. For the Ewe people in Ghana, the September yam harvest marks the beginning of their new year. The Ewe people dance, drum, wear animal masks, and display fetishes—small stone carvings of animals that are believed to protect their owners. In the evening, the townspeople turn off all of the lights. Town leaders called fetish priests lead a procession through the streets. The priests carry a bundle, made of rope and leaves, believed to cleanse the

town of evil. At the end of the procession, the priests bury the bundle and pray that no evil crosses over it. When the sun rises, the farmers parade around town to mark the new yam harvest. The townspeople sit down to sample a feast of the many foods made from yams.

Nigerians celebrate the Iri-Ji festival. In Nigeria, ji means “yam,” and yams are believed to represent life. The celebration provides a link between the living and their ancestors. Traditional tribal dances and music entertain the festivalgoers while they feast on futuri, a dish made from yams and squash. Cooks also pound yams to make fufu.

For two days in February, the people of Sokoto, Nigeria, hold the Argungu fishing festival. Thousands of men and boys wade into the Sokoto River carrying nets stretched over bamboo poles. Although

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it is the only time during the year that fishing is allowed in the river, participants are allowed just 45 minutes to fish. Some catch fish that weigh as much as 150 pounds. After watching the men fish, villagers listen to music, watch traditional dances, and cheer for the boys competing in wrestling matches. The festival features foods made with the fish that are caught.

In the Ghanaian countryside, the Ga people hold the Homowo festival each August. *Homowo* means “hooting at hunger.” Long ago, this region suffered a severe famine. Ever since, the Ga people have held the festival to give thanks for good harvests. The Ga people eat milled corn and fish in memory of their ancestors. To the beat of drums, cooks pour cornmeal and palm oil around houses to protect those who live there from hunger.

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Other West African celebrations honor religious holidays or long-standing traditions. The most important Islamic holiday is Eid al-Fitr, the big feast that brings Ramadan fasting to an end. Ramadan celebrates the ninth month in the Islamic calendar. Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset to honor the holiday. To West Africans in Nigeria, Senegal, and Guinea, this is the most important day of the year. In Nigeria, Muslim men begin the days by praying at a mosque (Islamic house of worship). In the afternoon, each city holds a festival featuring a parade that ends at the palace of the local ruler, called the emir. Horsemen in uniform and people swinging swords and spears march to the beat of drums and the sound of blowing horns. Entertainers such as acrobats, jugglers, and snake charmers delight crowds on the palace grounds. All the while, people enjoy salads and lamb roasted over a fire.

In Côte d'Ivoire, a country that was once a French colony, city dwellers speak French and follow French customs. Many are Christians and go to church on Christmas Eve, enjoying a big dinner called *le réveillon* at midnight. *Le réveillon* means “to wake up to a new day.” For dessert, celebrants have Yule log cake, which decorates the center of the table during the meal. In other West African countries, many of which were once ruled by Great Britain, families may celebrate Christmas. Sometimes, traditional British holiday foods, such as Christmas pudding, are served. But many eat West African foods, such as fufu and soups or stews, instead.

When a child is born to the Yoruba in southwestern Nigeria, the family celebrates with a naming ceremony called Ikomo. Ikomo is believed to welcome the child into the community. A high priest, called the Baba Lawo, leads the ceremony. The child's aunt gathers honey, water, and salt—foods that will be sprinkled on the baby's tongue. The honey represents hope for a sweet, good life for the child. Water confirms wishes that the baby will be as mighty as the ocean. And salt serves as a reminder that life isn't always good. Once the baby has tasted the foods, guests dab a bit of the mixture on their tongues. Then the oldest family member announces the baby's

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name. The ceremony ends with a big feast that might include jollof rice, spicy kabobs, groundnut stew, and ginger-roasted fish.

For countries that were once European colonies, the day of independence is celebrated. Each August, Senegal marks its independence from France in 1960. Senegalese National Day is one of the country's most popular holidays. Parades, music, and good food put people in a festive mood. Senegalese families may dine on *yassa*—chicken marinated in chili sauce and fried in a skillet—a dish reserved for special occasions.





Before You Begin

Cooking any dish, plain or fancy, is easier and more fun if you are familiar with its ingredients. West African cooking makes use of some ingredients that you may not know. You should also be familiar with the special terms that will be used in various recipes in this book. Therefore, before you start cooking any of the dishes in this book, study the following “dictionary” of cooking utensils, cooking terms, and special ingredients. Review the Careful Cook section on page 20. Be sure to read through each recipe from beginning to end. Then you will be ready to shop for ingredients and organize the cookware you will need. Once you have assembled everything, you can begin to cook.

Coconut crisps (recipe on page 39) surround a bowl of kulikuli (recipe on page 38), a snack that consists mostly of ground-up peanuts.

The Careful Cook

Whenever you cook, there are certain safety rules you must always keep in mind. Even experienced cooks follow these rules when they are in the kitchen.

- Always wash your hands before handling food. Thoroughly wash all raw vegetables and fruits to remove dirt, chemicals, and insecticides. Wash uncooked poultry, fish, and meat under cold water.
- Use a cutting board when cutting up vegetables and fruits. Don't cut them up in your hand! And be sure to cut in a direction away from you and your fingers.
- Long hair or loose clothing can easily catch fire if brought near the burners of a stove. If you have long hair, tie it back before you start cooking.
- Turn all pot handles toward the back of the stove so that you will not catch your sleeves or jewelry on them. This is especially important when younger brothers and sisters are around. They could easily knock off a pot and get burned.
- Always use a pot holder to steady hot pots or to take pans out of the oven. Don't use a wet cloth on a hot pan because the steam it produces could burn you.
- Lift the lid of a steaming pot with the opening away from you so that you will not get burned.
- If you get burned, hold the burn under cold running water. Do not put grease or butter on it. Cold water helps to take the heat out, but grease or butter will only keep it in.
- If grease or cooking oil catches fire, throw baking soda or salt at the bottom of the flame to put it out. (Water will not put out a grease fire.) Call for help, and try to turn all the stove burners to "off."

Cooking Utensils

colander—A bowl with holes in the bottom and sides. It is used for draining liquid from a solid food.

Dutch oven—A heavy pot with a tight-fitting, domed lid

skewer—A thin metal rod used to hold small pieces of food for broiling or grilling

slotted spoon—A spoon with small openings used to pick solid food out of a liquid

spatula—A flat, thin utensil, usually metal, that is used to lift, toss, turn, or scoop up food

tongs—A utensil shaped either like a scissor or a tweezer with flat, blunt ends that are used to grasp food

Cooking Terms

broil—To cook by exposing food directly to heat or fire

brown—To cook food quickly in fat over high heat so that the surface turns an even brown

garnish—To decorate with small pieces of food, such as parsley sprigs

sauté—To fry quickly over high heat in oil or fat, stirring or turning the food to prevent burning

simmer—To cook over low heat in liquid kept just below its boiling point. Bubbles may occasionally rise to the surface.

stir-fry—To quickly cook bite-sized pieces of food in a small amount of oil over high heat

Special Ingredients

allspice—A mildly scented spice prepared from the berries of the allspice tree

black-eyed peas—Small, tan-colored peas with a large black spot (from which they get their name)

bouillon cubes—Small cubes that make broth when combined with hot water

chickpeas—Yellow in color and slightly larger than green peas, chickpeas (also called garbanzo beans) have a firm texture and mild, nutlike flavor

chili—A small, hot red or green pepper

cloves—Dried buds from a small evergreen tree. Cloves are used whole or ground to flavor food.

coconut milk—The white, milky liquid extracted from coconut meat and used to give a coconut flavor to foods. It is available in cans at most grocery stores.

eggplant—A vegetable with shiny purple-black skin and yellow flesh

egusi seeds—Melon seeds with a pleasant nutty flavor. They can be found at co-ops and West African specialty grocery stores.

garlic—A bulb-forming herb whose distinctive flavor is used in many dishes. Fresh garlic can usually be found in the produce department of a supermarket. Each bulb can be broken up into sections called cloves. Most recipes use only a few cloves. Before you chop up a clove of garlic, you will have to remove the brittle, papery covering that surrounds it.

habañero pepper—An orange Mexican hot pepper

Hubbard squash—A large winter squash with a hard, thick, and bumpy shell that ranges from dark green to bright orange in color

jalapeño pepper—A green Mexican hot pepper

mango—A fruit grown in moderate climates around the world. A mango has tough green skin that covers orange flesh and juice that is sweet and tart.

okra—Originating in Africa, okra are green vegetables with ridged skin and an oblong shape. Although available frozen or canned, okra are best when fresh.

paprika—A dried and ground sweet red pepper, used for its flavor and its red color

plantain—A starchy fruit that looks like a banana and must be cooked before it is eaten

thyme—A fragrant herb used fresh or dried to season food

tomato paste—Available in cans or tubes, tomato paste is a richly flavored concentrate. The tomatoes have been cooked for several hours, strained, and the liquid has been taken out to create the deep red paste.

yams—A fleshy vegetable tuber popular in Africa, Asia, South America, and the Caribbean. Yams contains natural sugar and have a texture that ranges from moist and tender to dry and coarse.

Healthy and Low-Fat Cooking Tips

Because West African cooking relies on many vegetables and legumes and not on cream and butter, many dishes are naturally low in fat. You can lower the fat content even further by eliminating the meat from the recipes. Some of the recipes for appetizers and desserts do require deep-frying. If you are particularly concerned about cutting fat from your diet, it's probably best not to make these recipes.

In general, there are many things you can do to prepare healthy, low-fat meals. Throughout the book, you'll find specific suggestions for individual recipes—and don't worry, they'll still taste delicious!

Here are a few general tips for adapting the recipes in this book.

Many recipes call for butter or oil to sauté vegetables or other ingredients. Using olive oil or canola oil instead of butter lowers saturated fat right away, but you can also reduce the amount of oil you use—often by half. Sprinkling a little salt on the vegetables brings out their natural juices, so less oil is needed. It's also a good idea to use a small, nonstick frying pan if you decide to use less oil than the recipe calls for. Using cooking sprays to grease cooking dishes is an option, too.

Another common substitution for butter is margarine. Before making this substitution, consider the recipe. When desserts call for butter, it's often best to use butter. Margarine may noticeably change the taste or consistency of the food.

You can lower the fat content of egg dishes by using an egg substitute in place of real eggs. Similarly, when broth is called for, use low-fat and nonfat canned varieties to cut the fat. And, when a recipe calls for canned coconut milk, look for reduced-fat varieties. Many supermarkets carry “light” coconut milk.

There are many ways to prepare meals that are good for you and still taste great. As you become a more experienced cook, try experimenting with recipes and substitutions to find the methods that work best for you.

METRIC CONVERSIONS

Cooks in the United States measure both liquid and solid ingredients using standard containers based on the 8-ounce cup and the tablespoon. These measurements are based on volume, while the metric system of measurement is based on both weight (for solids) and volume (for liquids). To convert from U.S. fluid tablespoons, ounces, quarts, and so forth to metric liters is a straightforward conversion, using the chart below. However, since solids have different weights—one cup of rice does not weigh the same as one cup of grated cheese, for example—many cooks who use the metric system have kitchen scales to weigh different ingredients. The chart below will give you a good starting point for basic conversions to the metric system.

MASS (weight)

1 ounce (oz.)	=	28.0 grams (g)
8 ounces	=	227.0 grams
1 pound (lb.)		
or 16 ounces	=	0.45 kilograms (kg)
2.2 pounds	=	1.0 kilogram

LENGTH

$\frac{1}{4}$ inch (in.)	=	0.6 centimeters (cm)
$\frac{1}{2}$ inch	=	1.25 centimeters
1 inch	=	2.5 centimeters

LIQUID VOLUME

1 teaspoon (tsp.)	=	5.0 milliliters (ml)
1 tablespoon (tbsp.)	=	15.0 milliliters
1 fluid ounce (oz.)	=	30.0 milliliters
1 cup (c.)	=	240 milliliters
1 pint (pt.)	=	480 milliliters
1 quart (qt.)	=	0.95 liters (l)
1 gallon (gal.)	=	3.80 liters

TEMPERATURE

212°F	=	100°C (boiling point of water)
225°F	=	110°C
250°F	=	120°C
275°F	=	135°C
300°F	=	150°C
325°F	=	160°C
350°F	=	180°C
375°F	=	190°C
400°F	=	200°C

(To convert temperature in Fahrenheit to Celsius, subtract 32 and multiply by .56)

PAN SIZES

8-inch cake pan	=	20 x 4-centimeter cake pan
9-inch cake pan	=	23 x 3.5-centimeter cake pan
11 x 7-inch baking pan	=	28 x 18-centimeter baking pan
13 x 9-inch baking pan	=	32.5 x 23-centimeter baking pan
9 x 5-inch loaf pan	=	23 x 13-centimeter loaf pan
2-quart casserole	=	2-liter casserole

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A West African Table

In West African villages, preparing dinner is a social event. Sisters and cousins take a trip to the marketplace to buy fruit and fresh meat. Children pick fresh vegetables from the family garden. Making the meal may take the better part of a day, but the cooks don't mind. This gives the women in the family a chance to talk and laugh. When the men return from a day's work, dinner is ready.

When serving a typical West African meal, cooks ladle the main dish of stew or soup onto individual plates. The starch is served on a communal plate. The diners take turns using their right hands to scoop up small amounts of fufu. They roll the fufu into balls, dip the balls into their stew, and eat them. The starch cools the heat of the main dish, which can be quite spicy.

Villagers in Senegal combine their efforts to pound grain. They are using a mortar (large bowl) and pestles (large, thick sticks) to accomplish the job.

A West African Menu

West Africans traditionally eat two meals per day. The two meals are basically the same. They are usually made up of a soup or stew served with some sort of starch such as fufu or rice. Below are two dinner menus with shopping lists of the items you'll need to prepare the meals. All the recipes can be found in this book.

DINNER #1

Vegetables in peanut
sauce

Chickpea salad

Baked plantain
on the shell

SHOPPING LIST:

Produce

1 onion
garlic
3 lb. tomatoes
2 jalapeño peppers
carrots
1 head white cabbage
1 c. okra
1 red bell pepper
4 large, ripe plantains

Dairy/Egg/Meat

butter

Canned/Bottled/Boxed

vegetable oil
olive oil
smooth unsalted peanut
butter
2 cans vegetable stock
4 c. canned brown beans or
chickpeas
1 c. mild or hot salsa

Miscellaneous

salt
pepper
thyme
allspice
brown sugar
cinnamon

DINNER #2

Fufu

Egusi soup

Fruit salad

Sweet balls

SHOPPING LIST:

Produce

4 to 6 large, ripe mangoes
4 medium bananas
3 large tomatoes
1 small onion
1 or 2 jalapeño peppers
1 lb. fresh spinach

Dairy/Egg/Meat

margarine
milk
6 eggs
1½ lb. beef tenderloin
2 lb. crab, shrimp, or
smoked fish

Canned/Bottled/Boxed

Cream of Wheat®
potato flakes
1 can pineapple chunks
lime juice
peanut oil
8-oz. can tomato sauce
1 can pumpkin puree

Miscellaneous

salt
black pepper
sugar
shredded coconut
1 c. egusi or pumpkin seeds
baking soda
baking powder





Staples and Snacks

Mildly flavored staples such as fufu or rice are natural accompaniments to West Africa's hearty and spicy soups, stews, and sauces. These foods are often used as "utensils" to scoop up other foods.

Although West Africans traditionally eat only two meals a day, one in the late morning and one in the evening, they eat many snacks throughout the day. These snacks, which can also be served as appetizers, are usually very nutritious and actually amount to "mini-meals."

Ghanaians enjoy ntomo krako, or sweet potato fritters (recipe on page 33), as a snack.

Fufu

This is an Americanized version of fufu. To give your fufu a more authentic flavor, try leaving out the margarine and the salt.

4 c. water

1¼ c. Cream of Wheat®

1 c. dried mashed potato flakes

1 tbsp. margarine (optional)

⅛ tsp. salt (optional)

1. In a small saucepan, bring 2 c. water to a boil over medium heat. Reduce to low.
2. In a large saucepan, bring 2 c. water to a boil over high heat. Reduce heat to medium and add Cream of Wheat® (¼ c. at a time, stirring constantly). Add tablespoons of hot water from the other pan when mixture gets too thick to stir.
3. Add potato flakes ¼ c. at a time, stirring constantly. When necessary, add hot water.
4. Add margarine and salt and stir until margarine is melted. Continue to cook, stirring vigorously, until fufu pulls away from the sides of the pan and forms a ball.
5. Form fufu into cup-sized balls and place on plates or in bowls.

Preparation time: 30 minutes

Makes about 3 c. fufu

Sweet Potato Fritters/*Ntomo Krako*

Although the sweet potato isn't native to Africa, the root has made its way into many tasty West African recipes. This dish is popular in Ghana.

4 large sweet potatoes
1 tbsp. flour
1 ½ tbsp. peanut oil,* plus more
for deep-frying
salt, to taste
2 tbsp. milk
2 eggs
dried bread crumbs

* Peanut oil is higher in saturated fat than some other oils. For a healthier alternative, use canola oil.

1. Wash and peel the potatoes. Cut them into chunks. Place the potatoes in a large saucepan and cover with water. Bring the potatoes to a boil over medium heat and cook for 20 minutes, or until they can be easily pierced with a fork. Drain the water from the pan and let the potatoes cool.
2. Mash the potatoes. Slowly add the flour, 1 ½ tbsp. of oil, and the salt. Gradually add the milk. Stop mashing when the potatoes can be formed into small, smooth cakes. Form 1 tbsp. of the mixture into 1-inch-thick fritters. Place the fritters on a plate until you are ready to cook them.
3. In a bowl, beat the eggs with a fork. Pour the bread crumbs into a saucer.
4. In a Dutch oven or deep fryer, heat the oil for deep-frying to 375°F. When the oil is ready, dip the sweet potato cakes into the egg and then dip them in bread crumbs. Fry the cakes for about 5 minutes, or until golden brown on both sides. Serve hot.

Preparation time: 50 minutes
Serves 4 to 6



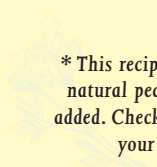
Groundnut Sauce

This sauce is made from groundnuts, better known in some countries as peanuts. Groundnut sauce is often substituted for meat dishes, although it is also served with dried meat and dried fish.

- 2 tbsp. vegetable oil
- 1 medium onion, peeled and chopped
- 2 medium tomatoes, cut into bite-sized pieces
- 1 small eggplant, with or without peel, cut into bite-sized pieces
- ½ c. smooth peanut butter*
- ¼ c. water

1. In a large frying pan, heat oil over medium heat for 1 minute. Add onions and sauté until transparent.
2. Add tomatoes and cook for 5 minutes. Add eggplant and cook for 5 minutes more.
3. In a small bowl, combine peanut butter and ¼ c. water and stir to make a paste. Add to tomato-eggplant mixture and stir well.
4. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer, uncovered, for 10 minutes, or until eggplant is tender.
5. Serve with rice, potatoes, sweet potatoes, or plantains.

Preparation time: 30 minutes
Serves 4 to 6



* This recipe works best if made with natural peanut butter with no sugar added. Check the health food section of your local supermarket.

Akara

This snack is often eaten with a sweetened custard.

1 c. dried black-eyed peas

⅓ to ½ c. water

½ c. finely chopped onions

¼ tsp. black pepper

½ tsp. salt

½ tsp. chopped and seeded chile*
or ¼ tsp. ground red pepper

1 egg

½ to 1 c. finely chopped cooked
shrimp (optional)

vegetable oil

* Fresh chiles have to be handled with care because they contain oils that can burn your eyes and mouth. After working with chiles, be sure not to touch your face until you have washed your hands thoroughly with soap and water.

1. Place the peas in a large, deep pan and cover with water. Let soak for a few hours or overnight.
2. With your hands under water in the pan, rub peas together to remove skins. Skins will float to the top and can be skimmed off. Drain peas in a colander and place in a blender or food processor with ⅓ c. water. Blend for about 20 seconds or until smooth.
3. Place ground peas in a large bowl. If mixture is dry, stir in water little by little until pasty.
4. Add remaining ingredients except for oil and beat with a spoon until light and airy. If, after adding the egg, the mixture is too runny, add 1 tbsp. of flour.
5. In a large frying pan, heat 1 inch oil over medium heat for 4 or 5 minutes until temperature reaches 375°F. Drop teaspoons of dough into oil and fry about 5 minutes or until golden brown. Remove akara from oil with slotted spoon and drain on paper towels. Serve immediately.

Preparation time: 30 minutes
Serves 6



Groundnut Balls/*Kulikuli*

Groundnuts are grown in many parts of Africa. In northern Nigeria, the Hausa people make kulikuli.

2 c. shelled roasted peanuts,
unsalted

salt to taste

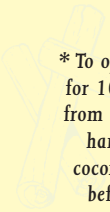
warm water

peanut oil

1. In a food processor or blender, grind the nuts very finely.
2. Pour the groundnuts onto a paper towel to soak up the excess oil. Pour the nuts into a medium bowl.
3. Mix in salt to taste and enough warm water to make a stiff dough.
4. Roll the peanut mixture into small balls and place on a clean plate.
5. In a Dutch oven, heat 2 inches of peanut oil over medium heat. Use a candy thermometer to monitor the oil's heat. When it reaches 375°F, carefully place the balls in the oil.
6. Fry the balls in the hot oil for 5 minutes or until golden brown.
7. Remove the balls with a slotted spoon and place on paper towels to cool.

Coconut Crisps

1 coconut*



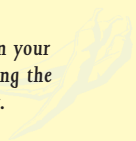
* To open a coconut, bake it at 350°F for 10 minutes. Remove the coconut from the oven and hit it hard with a hammer on the nut's seam. The coconut will split open. Let it cool before removing the meat from the shell.

1. Over a bowl, use a fork to remove the coconut meat from the shell. Peel the rind from the meat. Cut the coconut into long, thin strips.
2. Place the coconut on a cookie sheet and broil for 5 minutes or until lightly toasted. Watch the strips carefully, as they can burn quickly. Serve warm.

Preparation time: 25 minutes
Serves 6

Sweet Balls (Ghana)

1 egg
½ tsp. salt
3 tsp. baking powder
1½ c. sugar
½ tsp. nutmeg
1½ c. warm water
¾ to 1 c. all-purpose flour
vegetable oil



* Putting flour on your hands makes rolling the dough easier.

1. In a bowl, stir together first five ingredients. Add 1½ c. warm water and stir again. Gradually stir in enough flour so that dough is slightly sticky.
2. Roll dough* into balls the size of walnuts.
3. Pour ½ inch oil into a deep pan and heat over medium-high heat for 4 minutes. Fry balls, a few at a time, 3 to 4 minutes until golden brown. Remove and drain on paper towels. Serve warm.

Preparation time: 45 minutes
Makes 25 to 30 balls





Fruits and Vegetables

Hundreds of varieties of fruits and vegetables grow in Africa, and they are an important part of West African cooking. What people don't grow in their own gardens, they buy in open-air markets that offer everything from bananas and cucumbers to guavas and yams. These fruit and vegetable dishes can be eaten alone for a snack, a light lunch or supper, or they can be served as side dishes.

A colorful and nutritious fruit salad (recipe on page 42) can be made with a wide variety of locally grown fruits. Shaved coconut is used for garnish.

Fruit Salad

This salad is usually only served in well-to-do households or for special occasions. Chunks of papaya can also be added.

4 to 6 large, ripe mangoes

4 medium bananas

1 large tomato (optional)

1 c. cubed pineapple

juice from 1 medium lime

1 c. water

½ c. sugar

½ c. shredded coconut for garnish

1. Wash and peel mangoes. Cut into bite-sized cubes. Peel and slice bananas. Cut tomato in half, remove the seeds by squeezing each half over the sink, and cut into cubes.
2. Combine mangoes, bananas, tomatoes, and pineapple in a large bowl and toss, being careful not to mash fruit.
3. In a small bowl, combine lime juice, 1 c. water, and sugar. Stir well.
4. Pour dressing over fruit, cover, and refrigerate for at least 1 hour. Toss well before serving. Garnish with shredded coconut.

Preparation time (including refrigeration):

1 hour and 20 minutes

Serves 4 to 6

Boiled Corn and Beans / *Abrɔw ne Ase*

Corn is served all over Ghana. This dish is similar to American succotash.

- 4 c. fresh corn, cut from the cob,
or frozen corn
- 2 c. canned black-eyed peas, drained
- 1 c. water
- salt and freshly ground black
pepper, to taste

1. Put the corn, the black-eyed peas,
and the water in a medium
saucepan.
2. Cook, uncovered, over medium heat
for 5 minutes.
3. Sprinkle with salt and pepper to
taste. Serve hot.

Preparation time: 10 to 30 minutes
Serves 6 to 8

Boiled Plantains

For variety, try adding tomatoes, onions, fresh spinach, or a dash of curry powder to boiled plantains.

- 2 large, firm green plantains
- dash salt
- butter

1. Peel plantains and cut into 1-inch
pieces. Place in a large kettle.
2. Cover with water and add salt.
3. Bring to a boil over high heat.
Reduce heat to medium-low, cover,
and simmer for 10 minutes or until
plantain can be pierced with a fork.
Serve hot with butter.

Preparation time: 15 minutes
Serves 4



Fried Plantains

3 large, ripe plantains
vegetable oil

1. Peel plantains and slice into thin rounds.
2. In a large frying pan, heat $\frac{1}{4}$ inch oil over medium high heat for 4 to 5 minutes. Fry plantain slices for 4 to 5 minutes or until golden brown on both sides.
3. Remove from oil with slotted spoon and drain on paper towels.

Preparation time: 15 minutes
Serves 4

Grilled Plantains

2 or 3 large, ripe plantains

1. Cut plantains in half lengthwise and widthwise. Do not peel.
2. Preheat grill or broiler.
3. Grill or broil the plantains, skin side down, for 5 to 7 minutes, or until the plantains can be easily pierced with a fork and aren't sticky.
4. When cool enough to handle, peel plantains and serve.

Preparation time: 15 minutes
Serves 4

Baked Plantain on the Shell

This recipe is an easy way to enjoy an exotic fruit.

4 large, ripe plantains

½ c. brown sugar

¾ tsp. cinnamon

¼ c. butter or margarine, melted

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Wash plantains and cut in half lengthwise. Do not peel.
3. Arrange in a shallow, greased baking dish with cut sides facing up.
4. In a small bowl, combine brown sugar, cinnamon, and melted butter. Stir well.
5. Top plantains with brown sugar mixture.
6. Cover dish with tinfoil and bake for 35 minutes or until plantains are soft.

Preparation time: 45 minutes

Serves 4

Bananalike plantains are among the most versatile fruits in West Africa. They can be boiled, fried, grilled, or baked.







Soups

West African soups and sauces are quite similar to each other. Soups are served with a starch such as fufu on the side for dipping, while sauces, which are thicker than soups, are often served over a starch such as rice.

When cooks prepare soups, they tend to make use of whatever fresh ingredients are available. Some soups contain meat, but meatless soups are also popular and can feed many people at once. West African cooks find appetizing ways to combine vegetables and fish, with the zing of peppers or other distinctive spices.

Egusi soup (right, recipe on page 50) uses ground egusi seeds that give the dish a unique color. If these are hard to find, the recipe works with pumpkin seeds. Fresh fish pepper soup (left, recipe on page 51) features hot peppers—a very characteristic flavoring in West African food.

Egusi Soup

¾ c. egusi seeds (or pumpkin seeds)
1½ lb. beef tenderloin*
¾ tsp. salt
¼ tsp. black pepper
¼ c. peanut oil
2 large tomatoes, chopped
1 small onion, peeled and chopped
1 or 2 chili peppers or jalapeño
peppers, seeded and chopped
1 8-oz. can tomato sauce
1½ c. water
any combination of fresh or canned
crab, fresh or canned shrimp, or
smoked fish adding up to 2 lb.
1 lb. fresh spinach, cleaned and
finely chopped, or 1 10-oz.
package frozen chopped spinach,
thawed

* To lower the fat content of this soup,
use boneless, skinless chicken breasts
instead of beef.

1. Place egusi seeds in a blender or food processor and blend for 30 to 40 seconds, or until the seeds are a powdery paste. Empty into a bowl and set aside.
2. Wash beef and cut into bite-sized cubes. Season with salt and pepper.
3. In a large frying pan, heat oil over medium-high heat for 4 to 5 minutes. Add beef and sauté for 3 to 5 minutes or until brown but not cooked through.
4. Place tomatoes, onion, and peppers in a clean blender or food processor. Blend for about 30 seconds, or until smooth.
5. Add tomato mixture to meat, reduce heat to medium-low, and cover. Cook for 1½ to 2 hours or until meat is tender.
6. Add tomato sauce, 1½ c. water, crab, shrimp, and smoked fish. Simmer for 10 minutes.
7. Add spinach and ground egusi seeds and continue to simmer for 10 minutes more. Serve with fufu.

Preparation time: 2 to 3 hours
Serves 6

Fresh Fish Pepper Soup

The combination of fish and hot peppers is very typical of West African cooking.

2 lb. firm white boneless fish, cut
into bite-sized pieces

4 c. water

2 tomatoes

1 onion, peeled

3 to 4 sprigs fresh parsley or
1 tsp. dried parsley

2 chili peppers or jalapeño peppers,
seeded*

2 tsp. salt

1 tsp. dried thyme

1. Wash fish, place in large saucepan, and add 4 c. water.
2. Finely chop tomatoes, onion, parsley, and peppers and add to water. Add salt and thyme and stir.
3. Bring mixture to a boil over high heat. Reduce heat to low, cover, and simmer for 20 minutes.
4. Serve immediately.

Preparation time: 30 minutes
Serves 4 to 6

* By taking out the seeds, you
will have sharp flavor but
not fiery, hot taste.

Okra Soup

This recipe comes from Sierra Leone. To make this a vegetarian dish, omit the stewing beef and replace the beef stock with vegetable stock.

1 lb. stewing beef
1 tbsp. vegetable oil
1 large onion, thinly sliced
salt and freshly ground pepper,
to taste
3½ c. beef stock
8 small okra pods
2 small eggplants, sliced
3 tomatoes, peeled,* seeded, and
coarsely chopped

**To peel a tomato, place it in a small
saucepan of boiling water for about 1
minute. Remove with a slotted spoon and
cool until the tomato is warm but no
longer hot. Use a small paring knife to
peel off the skin. It will come off easily.*

1. Cut the beef into small cubes.
Heat the oil in a large stockpot and
brown the beef.
2. Add the onion, the salt, and the
pepper and cook for 10 minutes,
stirring occasionally.
3. Add the beef stock and bring the
soup to a boil over high heat.
4. Lower the heat and simmer,
covered, for 30 minutes or until the
beef is almost cooked.
5. In the meantime, wash the okra. Cut
the tops and bottoms off each pod.
6. Add the eggplant, tomatoes, and
okra. Simmer for another 15
minutes or until the vegetables
are soft.
7. Remove the vegetables with a
slotted spoon and put them in
a blender.
8. Return the vegetables to the pot,
adjust the seasonings, and cook for
5 minutes more. Serve hot.

Preparation time: 1 hour and 30 minutes
Serves 4







Main Dishes

In West Africa, families tend to eat their main meal in the evening. Cooks often have to cope with having only a few ingredients, but they have become skilled at substituting and at stretching a little a long way. By combining vegetables, meat, and a starch into one-pot meals, cooks can feed many mouths. On special occasions, however, the dishes may be served separately.

The ingredients of jollof rice (recipe on page 56)—lots of different vegetables, rice, and maybe meat—make this dish filling, nutritious, and colorful.

Jollof Rice

Jollof rice is a well-known West African dish. It can be made with chicken, beef, or no meat at all.

4 to 6 pieces skinless chicken

½ tsp. salt

½ tsp. black pepper

¼ c. vegetable oil

1 medium onion, peeled and finely chopped

¼ lb. cubed salt pork or ham

2 cubes beef bouillon

¼ tsp. ground red pepper

½ tsp. dried thyme or 1 sprig fresh thyme, crushed

1½ c. water

1 6-oz. can tomato paste

1¼ c. uncooked rice

any combination of green peas, chopped string beans, carrots, green peppers, or tomatoes, adding up to 2 c.

1. Season chicken with salt and black pepper. In a large frying pan, heat oil over medium-high heat for 3 to 4 minutes. Add chicken pieces and brown on both sides.

2. Place chicken in a kettle and set aside. Add onion and salt pork or ham to oil in frying pan and sauté until onion is transparent. Add onion and pork to kettle. Set frying pan aside. (Do not discard oil.)

3. Add bouillon cubes, red pepper, thyme, 1½ c. water, and tomato paste to kettle and stir well. Simmer over low heat for about 10 minutes.

4. Add rice to frying pan and stir to coat with oil. Add rice and 2 c. vegetable combination to kettle, stir well, and cover. Cook over low heat 35 to 40 minutes, or until vegetables and rice are tender.

Preparation time: 1 hour and 30 minutes

Serves 4 to 6

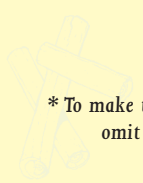
Spinach Stew

This is a very quick meal for city dwellers in West Africa, who have easy access to convenient canned and frozen foods. Spinach stew takes little time to prepare and is very nutritious.

$\frac{3}{4}$ c. vegetable oil
1 small onion, peeled and cubed
1 small tomato, cubed
3 oz. tomato paste
1 lb. fresh spinach, cleaned and chopped, or 1 10-oz. package frozen chopped spinach, thawed
1 12-oz. can corned beef*
1 tsp. ground red pepper
1 tsp. salt
4 to 6 servings cooked rice

1. In a large frying pan, heat oil over medium heat for 1 minute. Add onion and sauté until transparent (about 5 minutes).
2. Add tomato and tomato paste and cook for 5 minutes. Add remaining ingredients except rice, cover, and cook for 30 to 35 minutes over medium-high heat.
3. Serve over rice.

Preparation time: 1 hour
Serves 4 to 6



* To make this a vegetarian dish, omit the corned beef.

Vegetables in Peanut Sauce

- 1 tbsp. vegetable oil
- 1 c. chopped onion
- 3 cloves garlic
- ¼ c. unsalted smooth peanut butter
- 3 lb. tomatoes peeled, seeded, and pureed (or use canned)
- 2 c. vegetable stock
- 3½ c. water
- 1 tsp. thyme
- 2 jalapeño peppers, chopped
- ¼ tsp. allspice
- 1 tsp. salt
- 2 carrots, peeled and sliced
- 2 c. shredded white cabbage*
- 1 c. fresh okra, sliced into ½-inch pieces
- ½ c. chopped red bell pepper

* Try using a serrated knife to slice the cabbage rather than shredding it.

1. Heat the oil in a large, heavy skillet and sauté the onion and garlic for 3 minutes. Stir to prevent burning. Mix in the peanut butter and the tomatoes. Simmer for 1 minute.
2. In a saucepan, bring 2 c. vegetable stock to a boil. Lower the heat to a simmer and cook until only 1 c. of the stock remains.
3. In a separate saucepan, combine the water, thyme, jalapeños, allspice, salt, and ⅓ c. of the reduced vegetable stock. Bring the mixture to a boil. Turn the heat down to a simmer and cook for 30 minutes, uncovered. Stir occasionally. The consistency should be slightly thick.
4. Pour the remaining stock into a medium saucepan and bring it to a boil. Add the carrots, cabbage, okra, and bell pepper. Reduce heat to low so the mixture comes to a simmer. Cook the vegetables for about 15 minutes or until they are just starting to get tender.
5. Drain the vegetables and put them in a warm serving dish. Pour the peanut sauce over the vegetables and serve.

Preparation time: 1 hour and 15 minutes
Serves 4



Casamance Fish Stew / *Kaldou*

Serve this stew, which originated in the Casamance region of Senegal, over rice.

2 lb. skinless red snapper, cod, or
orange roughie

½ c. lemon juice

2 tbsp. peanut oil

2 large onions, sliced

1 qt. water

1 habañero pepper, pricked with
a fork

1. Wash the fish in cold water and pat dry with a paper towel.
2. Rub 1 tbsp. of the lemon juice onto the fish.
3. In a big skillet, heat the oil.
4. Cook the onion slices in the oil until they are soft and golden.
5. Add the water and the habañero pepper to the pan.
6. Bring the mixture to a boil and add the fish.
7. Reduce the heat and cook, uncovered, for 10 minutes.
8. Add the rest of the lemon juice and cook for 3 minutes more.
9. Serve hot with rice.

Preparation time: 30 minutes

Serves 4

Curry

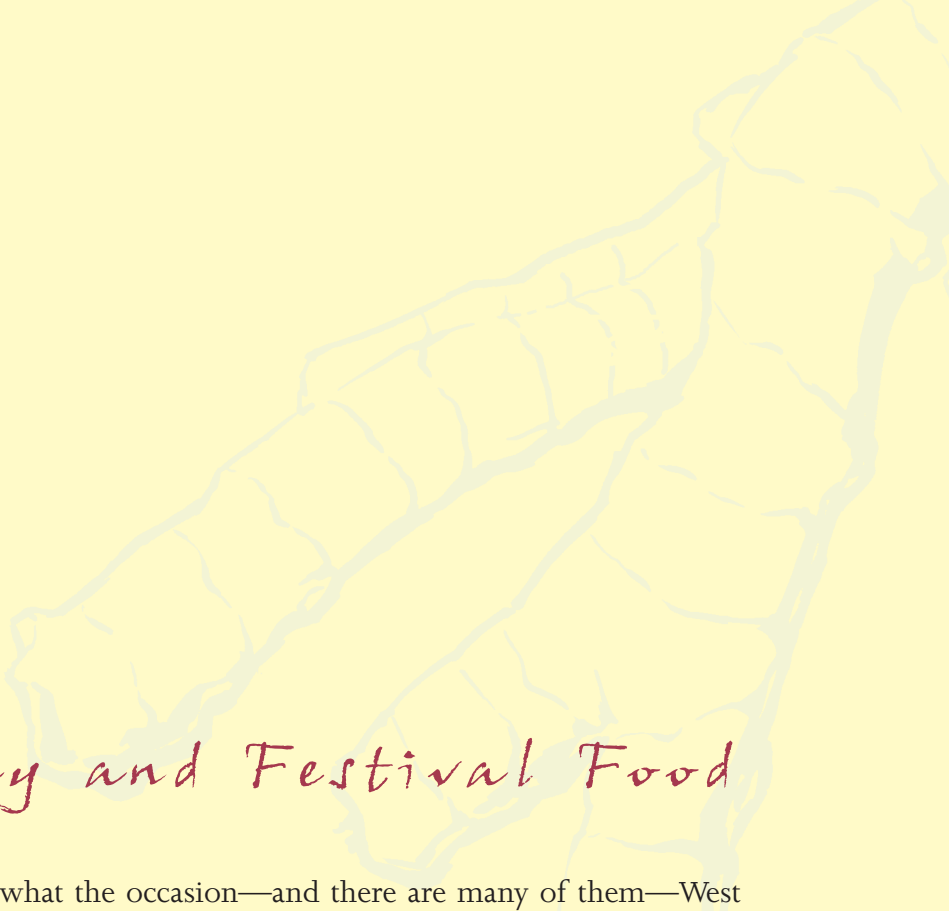
1 fryer chicken, cut up, or 2 lb.
lamb or beef, cut in pieces
1 slice of lime or lemon
salt to taste
1 clove garlic, minced
1 c. water
¼ to ½ c. peanut oil
2 onions, chopped
½ to 1 tbsp. crushed red pepper
6 tomatoes, peeled and sliced
1 tbsp. curry powder
½ c. tomato sauce
1 small potato, peeled and diced
½ tsp. thyme
1 10-oz. package frozen okra,
thawed and sliced
¾ c. evaporated milk*
1½ c. rice, cooked

1. Wash the chicken or meat in cold water and pat dry with paper towels.
2. Rub the meat with the slice of lime or lemon.
3. Place the meat on a plate and sprinkle with salt and minced garlic. Let the meat stand for 1 hour.
4. In a large pot, simmer the chicken or meat in water until tender.
5. Remove the meat and place it on a clean plate. Don't discard the stock.
6. Heat the oil in a skillet and brown the meat.
7. Add the onions, red pepper, tomatoes, curry powder, tomato sauce, potato, thyme, and stock.
8. Cook on low heat until the meat is tender and the vegetables are almost cooked.
9. Add the okra and cook until soft.
10. Add the evaporated milk and heat to serving temperature.
11. Serve over rice.

* To lower the fat content of this dish, use evaporated skim milk instead of regular evaporated milk.

Preparation time: 1 hour and 30 minutes
(plus 1 hour marination)
Serves 4





Holiday and Festival Food

No matter what the occasion—and there are many of them—West Africans associate good times with a wide variety of delicious foods. In fact, the harvesting of some foods is the occasion for celebration. Futari (recipe on page 68), for example, is a favorite dish during the Iri-Ji, or yam, festival in Nigeria. Freshwater fish are the focus of the Argungu festival.

Because some ingredients are costly, cooks tend to wait until a holiday or festival to prepare some of the more elaborate dishes. Chicken is particularly hard to find. Separating the starch, meat, and vegetables from one another—rather than combining them into one dish—also tends to be more common at holiday time.

Chicken yassa (recipe on pages 64 and 65) shows up on special occasions in Senegal. The long marination and the use of habañero peppers and their seeds make this a spicy, hot dish.

Chicken Yassa / Yassa au Poulet

This dish is served at special occasions in Senegal.

¼ c. lemon juice

4 large onions, sliced

salt and freshly ground black
pepper, to taste

5 tbsp. peanut oil

1 habañero pepper*

1 2½- to 4½-lb. precut chicken

½ c. water

1. Prepare the marinade the night before you plan to cook this dish. In a deep bowl, mix the lemon juice, onions, salt, pepper, and 4 tbsp. peanut oil.
2. Use a fork to prick holes in the habañero pepper and add it to the marinade whole.
3. Let the marinade stand for 15 minutes and then check the degree of spiciness. If it is hot enough for your taste, remove the pepper. If not, let the mixture stand for a bit longer.
4. Add the chicken to the marinade and stir to coat.
5. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and store in the refrigerator overnight.
6. To cook the next day, preheat the broiler.
7. Remove the chicken pieces from the marinade and place them on a piece of tinfoil on the broiler rack.
8. Broil the pieces briefly, until they are lightly browned on both sides.
9. Remove from the broiler, place on a plate, and set aside.

10. Strain the onions from the marinade by pouring the mixture through a wire-mesh strainer held over a second bowl.
11. In a large frying pan, heat 1 tbsp. of oil over medium heat.
12. Add the onions and sauté until they are soft and tender.
13. Add the rest of the marinade and cook until the mixture is heated through evenly.
14. Add the browned chicken pieces and water. Stir to coat.
15. Lower the heat, bring chicken to a simmer, and cover. Cook at least 30 minutes or until the chicken pieces are completely cooked. Serve the yassa hot over rice.

Marinating time: overnight

Cooking time: 45 minutes

Serves 6

**Habañero peppers are some of the world's hottest. With the seeds left in, you get a fiery taste.*

Ginger-Fried Fish

2 lb. firm white fish, such as
haddock, cod, or halibut

½ tbsp. ground ginger

1 onion, finely chopped

½ tsp. cayenne pepper

salt to taste

2 tbsp. peanut or corn oil

parsley sprigs

1. Wash the fish under cold water and pat dry with paper towels. Remove skin.
2. Cut the fish into small 1-inch pieces and place in a medium bowl.
3. Add the ground ginger, onion, cayenne pepper, and salt. Stir to combine and let stand for 15 minutes.
4. Heat the oil in a skillet over medium-high heat. Add the fish to the oil and use a spatula to turn the fish, allowing it to fry on all sides.
5. Serve hot over rice. Garnish with sprigs of parsley.

Preparation time: 40 minutes

Serves 4

Ginger-fried fish might be served at the celebrations following the Yoruba naming ceremony. The Yoruba are one of the main ethnic groups in Nigeria.



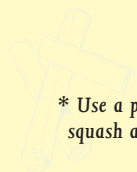
Yams and Squash/ *Futari*

Futari is a popular dish at the Nigerian Iri-Ji festival.

- 2 tbsp. vegetable oil
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 1 lb. Hubbard squash, skinned
and cut into 1-inch pieces
(discard seeds)
- 2 yams or sweet potatoes, peeled*
and cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1 c. canned coconut milk
- ½ tsp. salt
- ½ tsp. ground cinnamon
- ¼ tsp. ground cloves

1. Heat oil in a Dutch oven or a large saucepan over medium-high heat.
2. Add the onion and fry for about 3 minutes, or until soft. Stir constantly.
3. Add the squash, yams or sweet potatoes, coconut milk, salt, cinnamon, and cloves. Stir to combine.
4. Bring the mixture to a boil and then reduce the heat to bring mixture to a simmer. Cover and cook for 10 minutes.
5. Uncover and cook for 5 minutes more, or until the vegetables are tender, stirring occasionally. Serve hot in bowls.

Preparation time: 30 minutes
Serves 6 to 8



* Use a potato peeler to skin the squash and the sweet potatoes.

Chickpea Salad

This salad is a welcome addition to the lamb served at Eid al-Fitr celebrations in West Africa.

4 c. canned chickpeas, including liquid

1 tbsp. olive oil

1 onion, finely chopped

1 c. mild or hot salsa

salt and pepper, to taste

1. Pour the chickpeas, with liquid, into a medium bowl.

2. Add the olive oil, onion, salsa, and salt and pepper to taste.

3. Stir to combine. Refrigerate until ready to serve.

Preparation time: 10 minutes

Serves: 6

Groundnut Cookies

In Burkina Faso, city-dwelling Christians make these tasty cookies during the Christmas season.

3 c. (14 oz.) finely chopped, salted peanuts

3 eggs

1 c. brown sugar, firmly packed

3 tbsp. all-purpose flour

$\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. baking powder

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F.

2. In a medium bowl, combine the peanuts, eggs, brown sugar, flour, and baking powder. Use a spoon or mixer to stir until well blended.

3. Place tablespoonfuls of the dough 1-inch apart on a baking sheet.

4. Bake for 10 minutes or until lightly browned.

Preparation time: 45 minutes

Makes 3 dozen cookies

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